

Adapting Assessments in Light of the Emergence of Generative AI Tools: Principles and Practice

Introduction

This short note is designed to update colleagues on the guidance and resources for students and staff that are being developed within the University, around the use of generative AI software (hereafter GenAI) in learning, teaching and assessment.

A [range of advice and resources for staff](#) is already available, including specific [AI guidance for Semester 1](#) of the 2023-24 session on the need for Schools to communicate clearly with students about how they can and cannot use GenAI in their courses and assessments. These resources will continue to be updated, refined and augmented on a regular basis.

[Detailed advice](#) has also been developed on how staff may consider adapting their approaches to assessment in order to deal with the challenges of GenAI. This note provides specific guidance to staff on aspects of *policy* and *process* related to adapting course assessments.

In April 2023 [guidance to staff](#) was circulated about implications of GenAI for the spring 2023 exam diet. This guidance extended our February 2023 advice which indicated that we were not expecting or requiring Schools to make any modifications to their remaining 2022-23 exams and assessments, since we did not believe that such a University-wide knee-jerk reaction was justified.

We remain firmly of the view that knee-jerk reactions to GenAI are not appropriate. However, in view of the rapid evolution in the capabilities of GenAI over the past six months (together with the widespread publicity about these tools) we believe that Schools should consider whether it would be prudent to make *some* modifications to course assessments for 2023-24, particularly for modes of assessment that are considered vulnerable to GenAI (mis)use.

1. Normal procedures for making changes to courses and their assessments

The processes which should normally be followed for making changes to courses and programmes are overseen by [Academic Policy & Governance](#) and are set out in [detail](#). There is a specific section on [making changes to courses](#) which highlights the following essential points:

1. Schools have the authority to approve all course changes (including changes to course assessments) without the need for College approval.
2. Consultations with students/applicants, and external academics, are mandatory except in the case of simple corrections and **where the changes are non-substantive**. [Guidance](#) is available to assist Schools with carrying out effective consultations where they are required.
3. Under the normal timeline for completing course changes, these must be entered into PIP no later than 30 April, and approved no later than 31 July, preceding the academic session in which the course changes will first apply.

The third bullet point above would, therefore, **normally** preclude any substantive changes being made to courses or their assessments during Session 2023-24 unless these changes had been approved no later than 31 July 2023. **The purpose of this memo is, therefore:**

- **to exemplify changes to course assessments, made in response to GenAI, that may be regarded as non-substantive and thus implemented immediately;**
- **to identify the process that Schools exceptionally should follow to implement more substantive changes to course assessments for Session 2023-24, where it is agreed that these are considered necessary in response to GenAI.**

2. General expectations for Session 2023-24 Semester 1 and Semester 2

With **Semester 1** of Session 2023-24 already well underway, it is expected that **no changes should now be planned to the format of the components of assessment for any Semester 1 courses**, in order to make sure that students are properly aware of, and adequately prepared for, the assessments that they will undertake for the remainder of this Semester.

Thus, for any course that is scheduled to take place entirely in **Semester 1**, where the components of assessment have already been advertised in the course documentation as having a particular format and weighting (e.g. class tests, written exams, coursework assignments, presentations etc.), these formats and weightings should **not be changed for this course**.¹

For any course running in **Semester 2 only or over both Semesters**, Schools may, exceptionally, propose changes to the format and/or weighting of components of assessment that are scheduled to take place in Semester 2 or in the Spring 2024 or August 2024 exam diets. **Section 4** below sets out the procedure that Schools must follow, to ensure that an appropriate (albeit light-touch) degree of consultation is undertaken for these changes where they are considered to be substantive.

Furthermore, **Section 3** below gives examples of **non-substantive changes** to assessments that can be made for courses running in either Semester 1 or Semester 2 or over both Semesters. Such non-substantive changes must still be presented to the relevant School Board of Study for approval but do not require a consultation process. However, the relevant PIP form must still be updated as soon as possible to reflect these changes.

Finally, it should be noted that **no changes to Programme Specifications should be made for 2023-24 in response to GenAI**.

3. Substantive versus non-substantive changes to course assessments

As a general principle, a **substantive** change to a course assessment means a change that should require students to modify how they study/prepare for the assessment, while a **non-substantive** change would conversely *not* require students to modify how they study/prepare for the assessment.

A useful way to characterise whether or not students would need to modify their study/preparations for an assessment is in terms of the HESA types (and their relative weightings) that appear in Course Specification forms on the University's PIP system. These are:

- Written exam
- Written assignment, including essay
- Report
- Dissertation
- Portfolio
- Project output (other than dissertation)
- Oral assessment and presentation
- Practical skills assessment

¹ Decisions about whether exams in the Winter 2023 diet are delivered in person or online will be made very shortly, following the general principles that were developed for the Winter 2022 diet but updated to include consideration of assessments' vulnerability to GenAI.

Any change to the components of assessment of a course that changes the **HESA type** for any component, or significantly alters by 20% or more relative weightings between existing components of assessment, will be considered a **substantive change**.²

Schools may also wish to consider making a **non-substantive** change to the assessment scheme for a course by including a new, reflective component or sub-component that by design should be less vulnerable to GenAI misuse. A good example of this might be e.g. to take a report that is currently worth 60% of the assessment weighting and modify this component so that 50% weighting is applied to the report itself and 10% to an accompanying reflection on the process of preparing the report.

The above example modification is certainly small in terms of the change to the percentage weightings. Moreover, one could argue that the accompanying reflection should not require students to significantly change how they study/prepare for the assessment component. Consequently, this modification can be regarded as a **non-substantive change**. It must still be presented to the relevant School Board of Study for approval, and the relevant PIP form must still be updated as soon as possible to reflect the change, but it does not require a consultation process.

Finally, changes to the **content** or **style** of individual questions or tasks *within* a component (or sub-component) of assessment may be both appropriate and desirable, in recognition of the potential impact of GenAI. Indeed it is anticipated that such changes may have *already* formed part of many Schools' planning for their assessment of 2023-24 courses, in either Semester 1 or 2 or both. **Modifications to the content or style of individual questions or tasks should *not* be considered as substantive changes and can be made immediately without requiring Board of Studies approval of any kind.**

Examples of such non-substantive changes in the content or style of individual sub-components of assessment, designed to make them less vulnerable to GenAI, include:

- Adding a requirement in an essay question to reflect on discussion of that topic in class/on a forum on the course Moodle site.
- Asking students to link their answers to case studies discussed in class.
- Adding a requirement (in a discursive or quantitative question) to reflect on the validity or robustness of any assumptions made, or the applicability of the methodology adopted to other situations or scenarios.
- Where appropriate, incorporating into an essay question a requirement to comment on the topic from personal experience.
- Where appropriate, asking students to reflect on how what they have learned is transferable/applied and used in their own practice and (meta)learning.

Some further examples can be found on the [L&T AI guidance pages](#).

Before finalising any component of assessment (e.g. a coursework assignment or online exam) it is also good practice to test individual questions and tasks against GenAI and consider any appropriate changes to the questions/tasks in light of its performance.

4. Process for proposing substantive changes to course assessments for Session 2023-24

The necessary governance authority to make exceptional changes to course assessments for implementation during the current session is provided under [paragraph 16.2 of the Code of](#)

² Note, however, and as already highlighted in Section 2, the relative weightings of course assessment components should **not** be adjusted for 2023-24 Semester 1 assessments – even where the change is less than 20%.

[Assessment](#) – as was also the case for the exceptional measures introduced in session 2022-23 to mitigate the impact of the UCU marking and assessment boycott.

To maintain the academic rigour and integrity of the course approval process (and notwithstanding the authority of the Clerk of Senate to approve exceptional adjustments to the assessment scheme) where Schools wish to make such changes for Session 2023-24 some minimal consultation **must** still be undertaken.

Specifically, where a substantive change to a component of assessment is deemed appropriate for implementation in Session 2023-24, for a course running in **Semester 2 only or over both Semesters**, Schools will still be expected to consult with the following bodies before presenting the proposed change to the appropriate Board of Studies for approval:

- **External Examiner(s)** for the course.
- **Students currently enrolled** on the course (i.e., ONLY that group of students who would be directly affected by the proposed change). Such student consultations can take place electronically, e.g. by email with elected student representatives or via a survey on Moodle/Microsoft Forms/etc.

Staff should also be mindful of any relevant accreditation requirements of the course when proposing the change, although a formal consultation of the accrediting bodies is not strictly necessary.

It is worth noting that, in this context, consultation does not mean that the agreement of those consulted is strictly required, or that those consulted have the ‘power of veto’ over the proposed change. Rather, it means describing the proposed change fully and clearly, and seeking comment and advice that will inform the final decision/action.

In addition to consulting with the students currently enrolled on the course, so that the students are fully aware of the proposed changes to the course assessment(s) and the rationale for those changes, Schools should also plan to share with the students on the course clear information about the changes. This information should include any anticipated changes in how students would be expected to approach their study and revision for the course. The [Clerk of Senate](#) can offer advice on the wording of any student communications about assessment changes.

5. Summary

The advice presented in this memo, on making changes to course assessments for Session 2023-24 in response to the challenges of GenAI, may be summarised as follows.

1. Changes to the content or style of individual questions or tasks *within* a component (or sub-component) of assessment can be made immediately, for courses that are running in Semester 1 or Semester 2 or in both Semesters. **No changes** to the course documentation in PIP are required in this case.
2. **No changes** should be made to the format (e.g. HESA type and/or relative weighting) of the components or sub-components of assessment for any 2023-24 Semester 1 course.
3. **Non-substantive changes** (see Section 3 for how this is defined) can be made to the components or sub-components of assessment for any 2023-24 Semester 1 course, provided these do not alter the relative weighting of these components or sub-components within the scheme of assessment.
4. **Non-substantive changes** (including *small* changes to the weightings of components or sub-components of assessment) may also be made for any 2023-24 Semester 2 course, or for any course running over both Semesters, where the components or sub-components of assessment are scheduled to take place in Semester 2 or during the April/May 2024 exam diet or August 2024 resit diet.

5. Any such non-substantive changes for Session 2023-24 **must** still be reported to and approved by the relevant School Board of Study. The relevant PIP form should be updated as soon as possible to reflect the changes made.
6. **Substantive changes** (including *larger* changes to the weightings of components or sub-components of assessment) may also be made for any 2023-24 Semester 2 course, or for any course running over both Semesters. In this case, Schools **must** still carry out a light-touch consultation of the External Examiner(s) and the students currently enrolled on the course. The changes **must** be reported to and approved by the relevant School Board of Study and the relevant PIP form should be updated to reflect the changes made.
7. For any course where changes to the scheme of assessment are made, Schools should share with the students on the course clear information and guidance about any anticipated changes in how students would be expected to approach their study and revision for the course.